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ABSTRACT

This brochure was written to answer parents' questions about Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) education in Manitoba schools and AIDS as a disease. It discusses the seriousness of the AIDS epidemic and presents statistics from a nationwide study of the attitudes, knowledge, and behavior of Canadian youth in grades 7, 9, and 11 to describe how young people feel about AIDS. It explains how AIDS education materials are developed for Manitoba schools, who teaches AIDS education in the schools, and who decides if a child is to attend an AIDS education program. Information is provided on how parents can review AIDS curriculum materials. The report explains why AIDS education begins in grades five and six and briefly reviews what is taught to students in grades five and six, junior high schools, and high schools. Other information is provided on AIDS--what it is, how it is spread, and one's risk of getting AIDS in day-to-day situations. The report concludes with a list of audio-visuals and publications about AIDS. (NB)

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AIDS

A Parents' Guide to AIDS Education in Schools

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Introduction

Prevention Through AIDS Education

Since the early 1980s, AIDS has emerged as an epidemic disease and a major public health problem throughout the world. Because there is no cure for AIDS, the most effective method of combatting this deadly disease is through prevention and education programs.

AIDS education in schools is a critically important part of Manitoba's AIDS prevention strategy. For the program to be fully effective, the co-operation of concerned parents and educators is essential. Our students need to be given up-to-date factual information about the nature, cause, transmission and prevention of this disease.

This brochure is designed to answer parent's questions about AIDS education in Manitoba schools and AIDS as a disease. Parents and educators both have a vital role to play in ensuring that young people have the information they need.

How serious is the AIDS epidemic?

AIDS is now a MAJOR world-wide public health problem in all parts of the world. The World Health Organizations (WHO) estimates five to ten million people are infected with the AIDS virus.

In Canada, the estimate is that 50,000 people in this country have the AIDS virus. In the United States, health officials estimate 1,500,000 people are infected. As carriers of the virus, all of these people are capable of transmitting it to others.

What Do Young People Feel About AIDS?

A nation-wide study[1] of the attitudes, knowledge and behaviour of Canadian youth (including Grades 7, 9 and 11 students) indicates that:

- About 50% of students are worried about getting AIDS.
- About 85% believe they can keep themselves from getting AIDS.
- Grade 7 students are the group with most misinformation about AIDS.
- Young people look to television as their main source of AIDS information but tend to distrust and be confused about these media messages.
- Although most young people have a positive relationship with their parents, they tend to keep their concerns about sexual matters to themselves.
- Young people see their friends as unreliable sources of AIDS information and tend to believe that parents do not know enough about AIDS to be able to advise them.
- Approximately 25% of Grade 9 students report having had sexual intercourse. By Grade 11, this figure is about 50%.

[1] Canada Youth & Aids Study. Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. 1988.

How are AIDS education materials developed for Manitoba schools?

In 1987, the Manitoba Department of Education began to develop AIDS education lessons and resource materials aimed at preventing the spread of the disease. In preparing AIDS materials, the provincial departments of Health as well as Education and Training have been working closely together. The curricula are reviewed by the Health Education Steering Committee of Manitoba Education and Training and the Manitoba Education Council on AIDS, with a broad representation from the education community and the public health sector.

AIDS education materials are designed with a sensitivity and an understanding of the learning needs and developmental levels of young people. Beginning at the Grade 5 level, AIDS education focuses on providing students with factual information on AIDS as a disease. It also responds to the fears and concerns that students have and helps them to understand the needs of people with AIDS.

AIDS education in schools is designed to help students understand the disease and to make wise health decisions — decisions that will protect them from AIDS now and in the future.

Who teaches AIDS education in schools?

AIDS education from Grades 5 to 12 is taught by school teachers who have received AIDS in-service training. In-service training for teachers in Grades 7 to 12 began in 1987. In 1990 this training was extended to teachers at the Grades 5 and 6 levels. AIDS in-service training for teachers is an ongoing process provided by professional staff from Manitoba Health and Manitoba Education and Training.

In addition, community health professionals are available to support school divisions in presenting AIDS education programs.

Public schools have AIDS education materials which were developed by Manitoba Education and Training. School divisions are encouraged to adapt these materials to meet the specific needs of their students and their community.

Who decides if my child attends AIDS education programs?

Parents must be notified by the school before an AIDS education program is given to their child. Parents have the right to withdraw their child from these classes.

It is recognized that the prime responsibility for education dealing with sexual matters, including AIDS, rests with the family. Parents play a vital role by helping their children to understand this major health problem. They can greatly assist by knowing the facts about AIDS and openly discussing their attitudes and values with their children. Young people need information, guidance and support if they are to make wise decisions.

Can I review AIDS curriculum materials?

Yes. Parents are encouraged to review AIDS curriculum and teaching support materials that are used in schools. They can arrange to examine these materials by contacting their local school division office.

Copies of AIDS education materials produced by Manitoba Education and Training may also be purchased from the Manitoba Textbook Bureau, 277 Hutchings Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba R2X 2R4, 945-8940 or toll free 1-800-282-8069, extension 8940.

Why does AIDS education begin at the Grades 5 and 6 levels?

Although Grades 5 and 6 students are at low risk of getting AIDS, many of them have definite attitudes and misinformation about the disease. Much of this information is obtained through television. Students often view AIDS media messages with distrust which causes them fear and concern about the disease.

At this level, AIDS programs are designed to provide students with appropriate answers to deal with their fears and concerns.

AIDS education in Grades 5 and 6 involves factual presentations dealing with AIDS as one of many infectious diseases which attack

the body's immune system. These programs do NOT provide students with explicit sexual information.

The need for AIDS education at the Grades 5 and 6 levels is strongly supported by the Curriculum Policy Review Council, the Health Education Steering Committee and the Manitoba Education Council on AIDS.

What is taught to Grades 5 and 6 students?

At the Grades 5 and 6 levels, students are provided five hours of AIDS instruction. As part of the Health Education curriculum, AIDS lessons are expected to be taught after the Social-Emotional and Physical Well-Being units.

Students learn factual information about AIDS and other infectious diseases which attack the body's immune system. They have an opportunity to obtain answers to the questions they may have about AIDS. Through discussions and small-group activities, students develop a better understanding about people with AIDS.

What is taught to Grades 7, 8 and 9 students?

At Grades 7, 8 and 9, students are provided two to three hours of AIDS instruction at each of these grade levels within the Health Education curriculum. This includes information on AIDS as a disease, how it is transmitted, how it affects the body's immune system, and how it can be prevented. Students are strongly encouraged to abstain from sexual activity.

The students are able to share and discuss AIDS information. They also look at how values, friends, and the media affect decisions they make.

What is taught to high school students?

At the high school level, students are provided between 12 and 15 hours of AIDS instruction which can involve assemblies, classroom instruction, or audio-visual presentations.

Manitoba Education and Training has developed an AIDS resource package for high school teachers to use in physical education, biology, social studies or guidance programs.

In addition to factual information on AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, there is emphasis on disease prevention, social issues related to AIDS and the need for students to assume responsibility for their own behaviour.

Students participate in small-group activities which allow them to practise assertiveness training and sound decision-making techniques.

What is AIDS?

AIDS or Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome is an incurable, sexually transmitted disease. It is caused by "human immunodeficiency virus" or HIV. The virus destroys the body's immune system — its natural defence against disease.

A person with AIDS loses the ability to fight off illnesses which a normal immune system can prevent. Illnesses, usually not serious for a healthy person, become life-threatening for someone with AIDS. It is estimated that 80% of people with AIDS will die within three years from the diagnosis of the disease.

In the early stages, people with the AIDS virus usually look and feel healthy. This stage may last for months or many years, but during this time they may transmit the virus to other people.

How is the AIDS virus spread?

- AIDS is primarily transmitted through sexual activity. Over 85% of cases in Canada are spread from person to person in this way.
- The disease is also spread through the use of AIDS contaminated needles or syringes by intravenous drug users.
- AIDS can be transmitted from an AIDS infected mother to her child during pregnancy, childbirth or through breast-feeding.

What about giving or receiving blood?

In Canada, giving blood is perfectly safe. Blood donations are done by skilled medical staff using sterile equipment which is only used once.

Since November 1985, the Canadian Red Cross has routinely tested all blood donations for the AIDS virus. Any blood found to be AIDS contaminated is destroyed.

Since there is a remote possibility that blood transfusions between 1978 and November 1985 may have contained the AIDS virus, people who received blood during that time should ask their doctor if they should be tested.

Can AIDS be spread through kissing?

Social or "dry kissing" does not pass on the AIDS virus. Open-mouthed kissing with an AIDS infected person may be risky. There might be small cuts or open sores inside the mouth through which the virus could spread.

Am I at risk in day-to-day situations?

- You will NOT get AIDS by hugging or touching someone with AIDS or the AIDS virus.
- You will NOT get AIDS by using cups, glasses or silverware.
- You will NOT get the AIDS virus from toilet seats, whirlpools, baths or phones, water fountains or food.
- Domestic animals and pets do NOT carry the AIDS virus. And there is NO evidence that AIDS is spread by mosquitoes or other biting insects.

Resources

Audio-visuals

The following videotapes are available to the public and will be dubbed on request by Manitoba Education and Training for a minimal charge of $2.00 per program.

To obtain a dubbed copy of these video-recordings, send a blank VHS or beta videocassette to: Dubbing Centre, Manitoba Education and Training, Library, Box 4, 1181 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3G 0T3.

For further information on dubbing, call 945-7848 or toll free 1-800-282-8069 and ask for extension 7848.

The Immune System and AIDS. Toronto: Tapescan, 1986 (10 min.)

This video explains how the AIDS virus is transported by blood or semen, attacks the immune system and leaves the body defenceless against disease. Though biological in treatment of the subject, this program uses a military analogy where the body is a chessboard and the parts of the immune system are represented by cavalry and foot-soldiers. It works well in helping students visualize the harmonious functioning of the immune system in battle with the enemy virus. It concludes by emphasizing the importance of AIDS information to protect ourselves.

Audience level: Grade 9-12, Adult.

Aids: The Facts, the Future. Toronto: Ryerson Poly-technical Institute, 1987. (19:25 min.)

This program is a factually based discussion of what we do and do not know about the HTLV III virus, now called HIV. Included is an examination of the causes and consequences of contracting the virus, ways to prevent becoming infected, and advances that have been made in the area of AIDS research. Host David Suzuki explains that until a vaccine is discovered, "Prevention is the only vaccine we have."

Audience level: Grade 9-12, Adult.

AIDS Education: Videorecording. (59:05 min.)

This video consists of the three programs as well as an interview with Dr. Margaret Fast, Director of Communicable Disease Control, Manitoba Health. Following the interview, the programs are presented in the following sequence: "AIDS: What Everyone Needs To Know" (rev. ed.), "The Immune System and AIDS" and "AIDS: The Facts, The Future". It is recommended for use in high school by the Curriculum Development and Implementation Branch, Manitoba Education and Training.

Audience level: Grade 10-12, Adult.

Publications

The following publications are available from the Manitoba Education and Training Library through an inter-library loan that can be arranged at any public library. They may also be purchased at local bookstores.

AIDS in Canada: What You Should Know. Ottawa: National Health and Welfare, 1986.

A free pamphlet prepared by the National Advisory Committee on AIDS that deals succinctly with the central issues of AIDS in a question and answer format. Since its publication, the name of the virus that causes AIDS has been changed from HTLV III to HIV.

AIDS: What Every Responsible Canadian Should Know. (J.D. Grieg). Toronto: Toronto Sun Publishing Corp., 1987. $3.50

A good general introduction to AIDS presented through a series of questions and answers — questions most commonly asked; those about testing, about the relationship of AIDS and safe sex, government policy, women, the workplace, and the health care worker. Contains an "Information for Parents and Teachers" section.

AIDS: What Young Adults Should Know. (William L. Yarber). Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1987. $2.95

A 29-page booklet aimed at young people which provides a good basic introduction to AIDS: its cause, methods of transmission and methods of prevention.

Does AIDS Hurt? Educating Your Children About AIDS. (Marcia Quackenbush and Silvia Villarreal). Santa Cruz, California: Network Publications, 1988. $18.49 U.S.

Aimed at educators and parents, this book provides suggestions on dealing with what children need to know about AIDS and as a consequence, about sexuality, what kinds of questions children will ask at various ages, and what kinds of age-appropriate responses can be given.

In section one, there are nine chapters dealing with things such as "When should you bring up the topic?", "Special circumstances", "Trouble-shooting; anticipating problems that might come up in discussing AIDS with young children", all topics centring on how to impart accurate and appropriate information to the young child. Section two has a chapter on information for adults, including description and epidemiology, symptoms, and testing. Another chapter compares the developing stages of children to the need for information. A third chapter outlines the signs of child sexual abuse. Section three gives a list of readings and information sources. An invaluable resource, well researched and presented.

Audience level: Grade K-4, teachers, parents.

The Manitoba Education and Training Library updates a bibliography of its AIDS resources on an ongoing basis. Contact the Library, Box 3, 1181 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3G 0T3, or call 945-5371 or toll free 1-800-282-8069, extension 5371.